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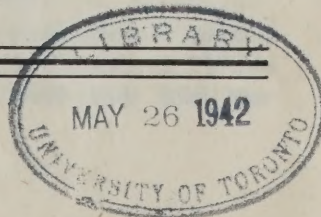


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CANADIAN WOMEN AT WAR

*summary of Canadian women's
participation in the war effort*



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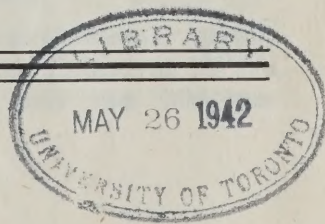
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CANADIAN WOMEN AT WAR

*A summary of Canadian women's
participation in the war effort*



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CANADIAN WOMEN AT WAR

On the declaration of war in September, 1939, a wave of emotion swept over the women of Canada who saw in it the disruption of their lives and, in many instances, of their happiness. But during the twentieth century they, like their British and American sisters, have been making steady progress toward emancipation and this coloured their reaction. Canada was taking up arms against the aggressor and her womanhood was not content to set any limit to her task in the face of world upheaval.

To-day the result of this militant spirit is in evidence. After two-and-a-half years of war, 75,000 women are working in munitions plants and it is expected that this number will be stepped up by several thousand within the year. There are scores of uniformed voluntary women's organizations throughout the country and approximately 5,500 women are wearing the official uniforms of the armed forces. In every Canadian household women are giving part of their time to specific war work and, by maintaining the health and morale of their families, are holding the home front.

Women's war activities may be roughly divided into three sections; voluntary, industrial and military. Of these, the most important is still the first-named, for while industrial and military projects have used womanpower to some extent, those women required for this purpose so far make up only a small percentage of the feminine population. The remainder make their contribution through voluntary organizations.

Voluntary Workers

When National Registration was undertaken in August, 1940, 2,285,370 women were listed as housewives. While some of these have since found their way into war

industries, the vast majority are continuing their daily round of common tasks along with the burden of extra war work. But while the homemaker's job may, to her, lack glamour, it is vitally important to Canada's war effort. The home is the nation's stabilizing influence. It provides a haven for the war weary and protection for the new generation.

With the outbreak of war, women turned their hands to making field comforts for the armed forces; Canada's recruits marched to the click of knitting needles. Red Cross workrooms were enlarged and almost every club and church organization in both English and French-speaking Canada added some special war work to its usual peacetime activities.

As the tempo of war increased new groups sprang up—from Aklavik in the Arctic to the United States border; from Prince Edward Island in the east to the Pacific coast, war workers organized. The Canadian Red Cross estimates that approximately a million women in Canada are now Red Cross workers and that 900,000 children are members of the Junior Red Cross. This does not take into account the 32,000 members of the Imperial Order Daughters of the Empire and many others whose work has followed along similar lines; nor does it include those women in auxiliaries to the Navy, Army and Air Force, who work not only for the men in the forces but also help their families at home.

Women's war work is constantly spreading into new channels. While a stream of field comforts, hospital supplies and refugee clothing is kept flowing steadily from Canada to the various war fronts, women volunteers are working also in the Red Cross Blood Donor's Service, on the Prisoners' of War Committee, on Salvage Committees, in placement of British evacuees and refugees, by making jams for shipment overseas, in the collection of special war relief funds and recently by sponsoring a nutrition campaign to safeguard the health of the nation.

Recreation Centres

In every city and town where military training camps are established women's organizations have opened recreation centres and canteens for the recruits. Most of these centres have reading rooms, radios and gramophones. Writing materials are frequently supplied and special entertainments—concerts and dances—are arranged.

The National Council of the Young Women's Christian Association is the only women's organization authorized to establish Hostess Houses at military camps and air training stations, and it serves the relatives and friends of service men as well as the men themselves. A "Rooms Registry Service" has been set up in most of these Y.W.C.A. centres to assist the men in finding lodgings for themselves or their families.

The December 1941 report shows that visitors to Hostess Houses and Associations numbered 485,219 and that 21,604 women from various organizations assisted.

First Aid Classes

Since the outbreak of war thousands of women have taken lessons in First Aid either through the St. John Ambulance Association or the Canadian Red Cross Society. St. John Ambulance reports that in 1940 and 1941, 156,000 people were awarded the Association's First Aid certificate and that of these approximately one-half were women. Many of them also added to their knowledge by taking home nursing courses.

Financial Contribution

Although women are inclined to minimize the usefulness of their voluntary work, feeling that the government could make greater demands on their energies, the fact that in 1941 a figure close to \$26,000,000. was raised in Canada for war services, is tangible evidence of their

success because it is recognized that a large proportion of this great sum was subscribed through the efforts of women's organizations.

It is, of course, impossible to report on the thousands of clubs and groups throughout Canada raising money for war work but the I.O.D.E.'s report of \$1,212,821 raised by its 32,000 members in approximately 28 months gives some idea of women's ability in this regard. Of this sum, \$230,384 was subscribed to buy aircraft and this organization is now inaugurating a campaign for raising an added \$50,000 for the purchase of a Hurricane fighter plane to be given to the people of Australia as a demonstration of Empire solidarity.

Among French-Canadian groups, La Federation des Femmes canadiennes-francaise which has 1,000 members, most of them in Ontario, Manitoba and Saskatchewan, has not only made thousands of field comforts but has raised the sum of \$3,800 for war work plus \$1,750 for the purchase of a light ambulance.

L'Association des Ligues de la Jeunesse Feminine, most of whose 1,500 members live in the province of Quebec has also added war work to its usual social service activities.

The Canadian Federation of University Women has given assistance to British women and university graduate refugees from enemy and enemy occupied countries and the I.O.D.E. which maintains and administers a fund, under government auspices for British war guests, reports a monthly payroll of donated monies amounting to \$1,700.

Urban Women

Women living in cities and larger towns have taken part in most of these wartime activities but as time goes on it is possible that many of them will have to take over full-time work in war industries.

Already those housewives who can afford domestic help are finding that their maids are needed for munitions

work and, as children cannot be left unwatched in a city block, many women are now taking turns at looking after the neighbours' youngsters so that each mother may have a free day to go into town or take over duties at war workrooms. Social Service workers believe that such informal neighbourhood plans may have to be developed on a larger scale as women with children are called into war industries. It is quite possible that the older woman will soon have an important war job—that of foster mother.

Rural Women

Increased use of manpower in the armed services has already added enormously to the task of women on farms who in many cases have had to add the job of chore boy to their already busy lives.

National Registration figures show that 22,700 women can milk cows, drive a tractor and handle farm machinery. It is possible that as the war progresses all these women will be called upon to do such work and that many others will be added to their ranks.

The fact that women in the country found time to take on additional war work, in spite of their increased farm duties, is proved by the Women's Institute with its national membership of 72,326 women. At the Institute convention held in 1941 it was stated :

"Highlights of war work included cash donations totalling \$45,000 to the Canadian Government and Red Cross. Special gifts were three ambulances, two mobile kitchens, a Bren gun, furniture for the recreation room at Camp Borden, bed units for the Red Cross hospital at Taplow, England, and physiotherapy equipment for a Canadian military hospital. Jam and fruits with a value of \$20,000 and seeds costing \$700 were sent to Great Britain as well as more than half a million garments and hundreds of quilts and comforters for British civilian victims of German blitzkreigs."

As war draws closer to Canada's shores, first aid classes are being organized in many rural districts by voluntary workers.

Uniformed Voluntary Groups

There are thousands of women in Canada who have joined volunteer uniformed organizations. Many of these have been established locally and some of them have provincial organizations. The Canadian Red Cross has a uniformed auxiliary known as the Canadian Red Cross Corps which is divided into four sections, namely, Transport, Nursing, Office Administration and Food Administration.

These women buy their own uniforms and give up evenings every week for training. They are prepared to give assistance to government war workers wherever possible. In Ottawa a number of Red Cross Corps office workers have been called upon to do stenography in some of the hard-pressed government war offices. They also act as chauffeurs for officials connected with the military schools and camps.

Many of these women have already enlisted in the recently established Canadian Women's Army Corps and the Royal Canadian Air Force (Women's Division) and are now wearing the King's uniform.

Co-ordination Is Sought

The voluntary activities discussed briefly above are merely highlights in a wide and useful field of endeavour. Lack of national co-ordination and direction of such work makes it difficult to provide a comprehensive picture. In response to a general feeling that more useful work could be accomplished with greater co-ordination a Director of Women's Voluntary Service was appointed in March, 1942, to the Department of National War Services.

It is the aim of this director, Mrs. W. E. West and her assistant Miss Frieda Held to help in the organization of co-ordinating councils which can successfully combine peacetime social services with wartime activities. Such a council was successfully put into operation in Vancouver at the outbreak of war, and has been operating through a Volunteer and Information Bureau. Among the many organizations which draw upon such a bureau are the Canadian Red Cross Society, the I.O.D.E., the National Council of Women, the Canadian Council of Jewish Women, the Catholic Women's League, the Y.W.C.A., the Children's Aid and the Comforts' Committees of the Navy, Army and Air Force as well as countless others. The Volunteer Bureau acts as liaison between organizations which need workers and those who have services to give.

The importance and value of the work women can do for Canada in their own homes and their own communities cannot be over-estimated in the opinion of Mrs. West, who sees in the extension of the war effort an opportunity for everyone to be of service.

War Industry Workers

Exact figures as to the number of women working in war industries are not available but it is estimated that approximately 75,000 were employed in munitions plants by the spring of 1942. The fact that many thousands more will be needed was made clear by Prime Minister W. L. Mackenzie King when he outlined the government's national selective service programme on March 24 of the same year.

The most important single feature of the programme, he said, was the plan to increase war-time man-power reserves by bringing more women into industry. This would necessitate changes in the civil service and institutional restrictions on the employment of female, and, particularly, married female labour. Plans would have to

be made for the provision not only of hostels and other housing arrangements but for nurseries and other means of caring for children.

The women already employed in munitions are drawn from all walks of life. Many girls have left jobs as store clerks, as waitresses, as domestic servants and as office workers to go into factories; others who were university graduates are now radio and laboratory technicians and research workers.

In July, 1940, there were only four or five hundred women employed by the Inspection Board of the United Kingdom and Canada to check munitions for shipment to Britain but by the winter of 1941-2, their number had risen to eight thousand.

Women are now doing everything but the heaviest kind of manual work; their patience and dexterous fingers are proving of great value in gun assembly plants, in the making and inspection of gun parts, fuses, shells, small arms, small arms' ammunition, cartridge cases and fire control instruments. In the airplane factories and in the pyrotechnic division where parachutes are made, thousands of women are employed.

Much of the work they do is tiring and tedious while some of it is dangerous, but it is all vitally important to the progress of the war. In some of the industries more than half the employees are women and in the new plants the work is being arranged so that a higher percentage of women can be employed.

Under the Dominion-Provincial War Emergency Training Plan set up in 1941, women are being given technical training which fits them for work in war industries. The course is free, subsistence allowance is given and when the women are placed in factories transportation costs are paid by the government. This course was given to older men and those unfit for military service but to date 5,412

women have been trained. It is expected that the number of women enrolled will greatly increase in the coming months.

Women in the Armed Forces

Late in the summer of 1941 the government established the Canadian Women's Army Corps and the Canadian Women's Auxiliary Air Force, which has since had its name changed to the Royal Canadian Air Force (Women's Division). By the end of April, 1942 the C.W.A.C. had an enrolment of approximately 2,300 and the R.C.A.F. (W.D.) 3,200. Their numbers are increasing by several hundred each month.

A basic training centre for the C.W.A.C. has been established at Macdonald College, Ste. Anne de Bellevue, Quebec, while the Air Force Women's Division training school has been established at Havergal College, Toronto, Ontario and at Rockcliffe, Ontario outside Ottawa. New training centres are being planned and are to be established as they are required.

The object of both the C.W.A.C. and the R.C.A.F. Women's Division is to release men in uniform for active service on the front line. Women are being recruited in some thirty classifications and among the trainees and those already serving are: transport drivers, wireless operators, radiographers, laboratory assistants, office clerks, cooks, mess women in barracks and hospitals, hospital assistants, equipment workers, and fabric workers.

Members of the R.C.A.F. (Women's Division) are now doing equipment repair work in several of the Commonwealth Air Training Centres and members of the C.W.A.C. are driving ton-and-a-half trucks and ambulances for the army. These are the more spectacular aspects of their activity but their usefulness in all the trades for which they are recruited is undisputed.

Plans are now underway to form a Royal Canadian Navy women's service, comparable to the Women's Royal

Naval Service of Great Britain, which is well-known as the Wrens. Like their sisters in the army and air force, these women will be recruited in order to free men for service at sea and abroad.

Wrens are arriving shortly from Great Britain to set up training schools and it is expected that these will be underway by September. At the time of writing (April, 1942) the Navy reports no urgent need for women in the service but it is expected that in future they will play an important part in dockyards and at Naval headquarters. Duties planned for them include operation of highly technical radio instruments, decoding, deciphering, stenographic and clerical work, cooking and driving.

Nursing Sisters

Shortly after the outbreak of war nursing sisters were recruited by the Army. By the spring of 1942 they numbered 875 and are now serving in Canada, Great Britain and Newfoundland. Two of them accompanied the ill-fated expedition to Hong Kong at the end of 1941.

The Royal Canadian Air Force has 115 nurses recruited for service in Canada and it is expected that an additional 200 will be attached to the Navy before the end of 1942.

Three hundred nurses wearing the uniform of Canada have been enlisted for service in the Union of South Africa.

Women and the Price Ceiling

As a result of the government's price ceiling regulations adopted as a measure to prevent inflation and stabilize the economy of the country, the women of Canada have been set a new task. Because it is estimated that women buy from 80 to 85 per cent of all goods purchased in retail stores, the Wartime Prices and Trade Board which is charged with the responsibility of seeing that the "price ceiling" holds has asked women to co-operate by keeping

a close check on retail prices. The Board has set up Women's Advisory Regional Committees for this purpose which will be kept in touch with all new developments and regulations.

In addressing the representatives of women's organizations at a meeting held in the Parliament Buildings, Ottawa in December 1941, Mr. Donald Gordon, chairman of the Wartime Prices and Trade Board said :

"We are going to ask every woman in this country to come to our aid in one vital aspect. . . . If women will see to it that retail prices are maintained—a big part of the (price ceiling) job is done.

"Most women do their shopping at a selected group of stores. We believe each woman, when she understands the need, will be glad to co-operate with us by making up her own individual list of basic prices. In a national campaign, which we hope the group here to-day will sponsor, each housewife will be asked to make a list of all the things she buys most frequently and the price of each item. As far as possible the price will be that which ruled in the September 15th to October 11th period, to be obtained from her housekeeping records or old bills. If no such record is available, the housewife will be asked nevertheless to keep a household list and record the current price in order to be sure that she does not pay more in the future. Women's organizations will be asked to help in getting lists of basic prices and in providing them to their members. They will be asked to thoroughly canvass the local situation in each community in order to establish as quickly as possible that each housewife is enrolled in this campaign. Now I want to give one word of warning here. The Wartime Prices and Trade Board has no reason to believe that retail shops are not co-operating in the price ceiling law—on the contrary, every survey we have indicates that they are doing so loyally. It is not our intention, therefore, that housewives be asked to consider

themselves as a monster police force or group investigators. Our idea is that housewives will, themselves, want to become familiar with the prices which are lawful and that there is a direct benefit to the household budget in encouraging them to do so. The retail shops will, we believe, be glad to co-operate and the campaign should be conducted in a spirit of mutual goodwill. When there is reason to believe that some store is not playing the game it will, of course, be our duty to take the necessary steps to see that the penalties provided are imposed."

Nutrition Campaign

Along with maintenance of the "price ceiling" regulations, Canadians have been asked to undertake another task—that of building up the health of the nation through improved nutrition. Through a diet survey, the Canadian Council on Nutrition found that many Canadians were not being properly nourished. It was shown that while in some instances this was caused by lack of money, in many cases it was due instead to inadequate knowledge of food values.

To meet this problem a Nutrition Service has been set up in the Department of Pensions and National Health which is headed by Dr. L. B. Pett and Miss Marion Harlow. Their immediate job is to see that war industry workers are properly nourished but this means that the women who keep house for those workers should make use of the latest and best knowledge concerning food values.

A nutrition campaign sponsored by the National Council of Women has resulted in free classes in nutrition being held in most Canadian cities. Thousands of women attend. These groups are made possible through the co-operation of home economics' graduates and teachers who are lecturing and in some instances organizing the classes.

Women Win Recognition

No survey of women on the Home Front would be complete without reference to those who have already won national recognition for their contribution to Canada's war effort.

The Wartime Prices and Trade Board has two women economists on its staff. They are Mrs. Phyllis Turner, formerly economic adviser to the Tariff Board, now Administrator of Oils and Fats, and Mrs. Graham Spry, the former Miss Irene M. Biss of the University of Toronto, who acts as economic adviser.

The same Board has also appointed a woman, Miss Byrne Hope Sanders, editor of *Chatelaine* magazine, as head of its Consumer Representation Branch.

In the realm of war industry, Miss Elizabeth MacGill, has won national fame as the first and only woman to be employed in Canada as an aeronautical engineer. She is credited as being an authority on aircraft and a master of design and is now chief engineer in the Canadian Car and Foundry Company at Fort William, Ontario.

Under the leadership of the Hon. Cairine Wilson, one of Canada's two women senators, the Canadian National Committee on Refugees has not only settled refugees in various parts of Canada, but has been responsible for the establishment of 100 new refugee industries with a total estimated value of \$25,000,000.

Doubtless, as time goes on, many more women's names will be inscribed in the record of Canada's war effort but there are millions of others who will never win public recognition but whose services are as great though in a smaller sphere. These, the women of Canada serving in all capacities, are holding the Home Front in the war against Axis tyranny and aggression.



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